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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [PTER](#) [RP](#) [NL](#) [NO](#)

SUBJECT: PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMUNIST THREAT IN THE
PHILIPPINES

REF: A. MANILA 5433

[1](#)B. MANILA 5346

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a. i., Paul W. Jones for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Asia's longest surviving Communist insurgency remains entrenched in the social and political landscape of the Philippines. The Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) is currently attempting to exploit domestic political tensions to force the Arroyo Administration from power, but with no real prospects of success from its own efforts. Although the CPP's armed wing -- the New People's Army (NPA) -- does not have the capability militarily to defeat the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), its 130 guerrilla fronts continue to threaten internal security and impede economic development. Philippine national security officials are concerned about perceived links between the Communists and Opposition political leaders. Peace talks between the GRP and National Democratic Front (NDF) remain suspended. Dutch authorities are reviewing the GRP's legal evidence against CPP-NPA leader/NDF political consultant/designated terrorist Jose Maria Sison, who has been residing in Utrecht, Netherlands as a political refugee. NDF representatives recently provided the Norwegian Government -- which has been a broker in the GRP-NDF peace process -- with a proposal for a 120 day cease-fire and possible return to the negotiating table. End Summary.

A Persistent Threat

[1](#)2. (C) Asia's longest surviving communist insurgency -- the CPP/NPA/NDF -- is active in most of the Philippines' 79 provinces. To maintain a support base at the grassroots level, CPP/NPA cadre often provide free medical care, education, and other social services to the rural poor, especially in areas where the GRP remains only a distant reality. These social services, as well as propaganda against the often ineffective and corrupt central governmental structure, help to explain the continued appeal of the CPP/NPA/NDF to segments of the Philippines' rural and urban population. (Note: An estimated 30 per cent of the Philippines' total population is living below the national poverty line. According to the World Health Organization, more than two-thirds of the poor reside in rural areas. End Note.)

[1](#)3. (C) At its peak during the 1980's, the NPA was at least 25,000 strong. But internal disputes -- exploited by the GRP -- split the CPP/NPA into factions including the Alex Boncayao Brigade (ABB), Revolutionary Workers Party/Revolutionary Proletarian Army (RWP/RPA), and Rebolusyunaryong Partido Manggagawa - Mindanao (RPM-M). By 1996, during the presidency of General Fidel V. Ramos, NPA troop strength dropped to about 6,000, but rebounded to approximately 12,000 during the late 1990's under President Estrada, ostensibly due to the release of 8,000 to 16,000 CPP/NPA members from prison during a general amnesty. According to current estimates, troop strength is now down to about 8,000, with 130 guerrilla fronts.

[1](#)4. (C) Despite declining numbers, the NPA remains a potent force, responsible for the deaths of at least 80 police and army personnel as well as 40 civilians during the first eight months of 2005 (ref b). The NPA targets not only GRP security forces but also internal dissenters, defectors, suspected government informants, and those who fail to pay "revolutionary taxes" or "permit to campaign" (PTC) fees.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Between 1970 and 1991, the NPA allegedly also killed 16 U.S. citizens -- six civilians and ten military personnel. From 1989 to 2001, the NPA claimed responsibility for or were primary suspects in at least nine bombings/attempted bombings against U.S. facilities in the Philippines using improvised explosives, rocket propelled grenades, and/or Molotov cocktails. Over this same 13-year period, the NPA took two Americans hostage in two separate incidents. Since 2001, there have been no reported attacks against U.S. citizens, although the NPA has periodically

warned that it will target any armed Americans that entered its areas of control or influence, notably during U.S. military disaster relief assistance after the December 2004 typhoons in northern Luzon.

Peace Talks Collapse, Attacks Increase

16. (SBU) Peace talks (begun in 1992) between the NDF -- composed of 17 organizations including the CPP/NPA -- and the GRP collapsed in September 2005 when the NDF declared that it would await the ouster of President Arroyo and reiterated its demand for the removal of the CPP/NPA from the U.S. and European Union lists of terrorist organizations. With the GRP suspension of immunity guarantees for NDF negotiators, CPP/NPA leaders vowed to step up armed attacks throughout the Philippines.

17. (SBU) During the two week period of September 24-October 8, the CPP claimed at least 74 military actions -- 24 of which were in Mindanao. The NPA continues to threaten security and impede investment/development by launching attacks on nearly a daily basis against the military and police, commuter buses, cell sites, construction equipment, and infrastructure. On October 9, five soldiers and three civilians were killed by NPA land mines in Misamis Occidental. Another NPA-planted land mine and ambush on November 19 left nine soldiers dead and 20 wounded in Iloilo, Western Visayas. From November 20 to November 29, the NPA has additionally killed at least 13 Philippine soldiers, wounded more than 35, and abducted a Philippine Marine sergeant. In response to these attacks, PNP Director General Arturo C. Lomibao recommended a revival of the rewards system for the capture of CPP/NPA leaders wanted on criminal charges.

18. (SBU) The GRP Peace Negotiating Panel For Talks With the CPP/NPA/NDF (GPNP-CNN) condemned the NPA's use of land mines as a violation of the Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) signed by the GRP and NPA on March 16, 1998 (see para 19). President Arroyo reportedly directed the AFP -- which vowed to intensify its operations against the NPA -- to ensure that there would be minimal casualties among GRP forces.

19. (SBU) NDF representatives contacted the Norwegian Government in mid-November with a proposal for a 120 day cease-fire and possible return to the negotiating table. Norwegian Embassy contacts were cautiously optimistic about this proposal but noted that the spike in NPA attacks since September could possibly be a strategy to strengthen the NDF's negotiating hand with the GRP. According to press accounts on November 23, at least two Philippine lawmakers, as well as the MILF leadership, have also called for an AFP-NPA cease-fire to help spur peace talks. AFP General Generoso Senga and CPP spokesperson Gregario "Ka Roger" Rosal separately stated that a cease-fire during the Christmas season was possible, but likely to be violated.

GRP Efforts Against the NPA

10. (C) The GRP's counterinsurgency campaign against the 130 guerrilla fronts of the NPA operating in 14 of the 16 geographical regions of the Philippines consumes the majority of AFP and PNP resources, according to officials of the Department of National Defense and Department of Interior and Local Government. From January to June 2004 (the most recent statistics available), there were 505 armed engagements between the AFP and NPA. However, by and large, the AFP does not undertake significant offensives or well-planned campaigns against NPA forces, but rather depends on chance encounters or retaliatory attacks -- even in the wake of the recent upsurge of CPP/NPA military activity.

11. (C) The PNP, which is mandated to support the AFP's counterinsurgency campaign, dedicates nearly half of its intelligence collection and investigative activities toward tracking members of the CPP/NPA, according to PNP sources. With many of the PNP's tactical operations focused against the CPP/NPA, PNP assets continue to be diverted away from other law enforcement operations to include those against Muslim terrorist organizations.

The Leftist Politicians

12. (SBU) The GRP has long pursued a non-military/law enforcement approach to winning over CPP members and other leftists. Under special provisions in the 1987 Constitution, up to twenty percent of Congressional seats are reserved for "party list" members, mostly to represent marginalized sectors of society rather than a geographic constituency. These far-left but legal groups include Bayan Muna, Anakpawis, Gabriela, Anak ng Bayan, Migrante, and Suara

Bangsamoro. Six party list representatives are currently serving in Congress: former NDF chairman Satur Ocampo, Teodoro A. Casino, and Joel G. Virador of Bayan Muna; International League of Peoples' Struggle (ILPS) - International Coordinating Group (ILPS-ICG) chairman Crispin Beltran and ILPS-International Coordinating Committee (ICC) member Rafael Mariano of Anakpawis, and ILPS-ICC member Lisa Largoza-Maza of Gabriela. (Note: The International League of Peoples' Struggle was founded on May 25, 2001, in Zutphen, Netherlands by the International Initiative Committee chaired by CPP/NPA leader and chief political consultant to the NDF Jose Maria Sison. According to its website, membership of the ILPS is composed of over 200 organizations from at least 40 countries that "support the cause of national liberation, democracy and social liberation against imperialism and all reaction." End Note.)

13. (C) Opinions vary widely on the relationship between the CPP/NPA/NDF and these legal leftist groups. Some -- including at senior levels of the GRP leadership (see para 14) -- view them as no more than Communist front organizations, and have claimed that they are funneling Congressional funds to the CPP/NPA as well as organizing anti-Arroyo demonstrations. Others view the participation of these groups in the legitimate political arena and institutions as a success story of co-option of formerly radical elements into the democratic process. Party list members uniformly deny membership in the CPP.

National Security Advisor's View

14. (C) At the direction of National Security Advisor Norberto Gonzales, the Philippine National Security Council (NSC) passed to the U.S. Embassy on October 16 an NSC analysis entitled "The Communist Movement's Role in the Destabilization Campaign Against the Government." Key points are:

--- The CPP/NPA/NDF has gained a firm foothold in the Philippines' mainstream politics with members of its front organizations sitting in Congress;

--- The CPP/NPA/NDF will enter into a power sharing arrangement with any coalition that can oust Arroyo from power;

--- The Communist movement is spreading propaganda, organizing street protests, and infiltrating/forming alliances with such opposition and civil society groups as the Freedom from Debt Coalition, Council for the Defense of Civil Liberties, Coalition for Truth, White Ribbon Movement, Gloria Step Down Movement, United Opposition, Bangon Pilipinas, Akbayan, and former President Estrada's Partido ng Manggagawang Pilipino;

--- Party list groups such as Bayan Muna and Gabriela have been attending organizational meetings, prayer and mass rallies, and press conferences of mainstream opposition groups under Senator Panfilo Lacson, FPJ widow Susan Roces, "Brother" Eddie Villanueva, and former president Corazon Aquino;

--- Communists were key organizers of a People's Tribunal that is holding an impeachment trial against President Arroyo outside the halls of Congress;

--- The NPA has increased its attacks on military and police outposts, businesses, and telecommunications facilities, and is targeting for assassination members of the GRP's national security/intelligence team and congressmen who withdrew their endorsements for the impeachment of Arroyo;

--- From August 20-22, the CPP Central Committee sponsored a training course of 22 NPA fighters on Command Detonating Explosives (CDX). One of the trainers was a Russian chemist.

15. (C) Gonzales in private meetings (ref a) has repeatedly mentioned the real threat that the CPP/NPA poses to the security of the Philippines over the long-term. He has cited this as a reason for concluding a peace agreement with the MILF in Mindanao so that additional resources can be deployed against the CPP/NPA.

A Political Refugee and Designated Terrorist

16. (C) According to an Embassy contact, Dutch officials are now reviewing the GRP's legal evidence against CPP/NPA founder/leader and chief political consultant to the NDF, Jose Maria Sison. (According to the Dutch Ambassador to the Philippines, however, the legal file is very thin.) Sison, who remains on the U.S. and EU lists of designated terrorists, has been residing in the Netherlands since 1987.

17. (C) Due to the lack of an extradition treaty between the GRP and the Royal Netherlands Government, rendition or deportation of Sison by Dutch authorities would be necessary to bring him to justice in the Philippines. Among the potential stumbling blocks to such an action is Sison's protection as a judicially recognized political refugee under the Refugee Convention and Article 3 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. GRP officials would also have to provide assurances that he would not face the death penalty if convicted; according to some sources, a recent letter from President Arroyo finally provided such an assurance.

Comment

18. (C) We see no signs that the CPP/NPA has any intention of abating its decades-old effort to overthrow the Philippine government or that it has any hope of ever achieving this goal. It continues to survive in reaction to chronic nationwide problems of poor governance, inadequate governmental resources to combat poverty, enduring resentment over official corruption and incompetence, as well as societal remnants of Philippine-style feudalism that continue to favor a small number of political and economic dynasties. The CPP/NPA's nationwide presence nonetheless make it a significant threat in the eyes of the GRP, which remains incapable of defeating it militarily.

Text of GRP Press Statement

19. (SBU) The complete text of a November 23 press statement by the GRP Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process - Peace Negotiating Panel For Talks with the CPP/NPA/NDF follows.

Begin:

We view with sadness and regret, the salutary message of the Communist Party to its New People's Army congratulating the guerrillas for its "string of successful tactical offensives" in the past two weeks.

We are appalled on how such a killing spree and consequent human suffering perpetuated on Filipinos by fellow Filipinos can be celebrated as an occasion for celebration.

We view with particular alarm, the New People's Army use of landmines in its assault against government troops. The GRP considers the use of any kind of land mines as a violation of the spirit and letter of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (CARHRIHL) signed by the GRP and NDF on March 16, 1998.

Part III, Article 2 of the CARHRIHL reads: "This agreement seeks to confront and prevent the most serious human rights violations in terms of civil and political rights, as well as to uphold, protect and promote the full scope of human rights and fundamental freedoms including: The right not to be subjected to forced evacuations, food and other forms of economic blockades and indiscriminate bombings, shellings, strafing, gunfire and the use of land mines."

The CARHRIHL clearly and deliberately does not distinguish between victim-detonated and command-detonated land mines. However the CPP defends use of land mines by citing international conventions.

We likewise condemn the NPA's persistent attacks on civilian targets such as Globe cell sites, which is a violation of CARHRIHL, Part IV, Article 4, item 4 which states: "Civilian population and civilians shall be treated as such and shall be distinguished from combatants and, together with their property, shall not be the object of attack. They shall likewise be protected against indiscriminate aerial bombardment, strafing, artillery fire, mortar fire, arson, bulldozing and other similar forms of destroying lives and property, from the use of explosives as well as the stockpiling near or in their midst, and the use of chemical and biological weapons."

We question the National Democratic Front's good faith when it interprets the straightforward language of the CARHRIHL to justify its violations and mangle the spirit and letter of this sacred agreement.

End.

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Jones